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Middle East

EGYPT 31

President Sadat has been working to repair the damage done to his prestige and that of his government by the rioting that shook Egypt in mid-January. His efforts apparently have been at least partially successful, but he has been unable to find any quick or easy solutions to Egypt's pressing economic problems, the basic cause of the civil unrest.

Over the past two weeks Sadat has held a series of meetings with educators, students, and workers, and made a major address to the nation. In each case, he has sought to deflect criticism from himself and his government by blaming the unrest on leftist conspirators. He has refused to bow to pressures to oust Prime Minister Mamduh Salim, who is widely blamed for Egypt's economic woes, and instead has sacked the interior minister for his failure to head off the riots. Sadat has also announced tax reforms directed against the wealthy and held a referendum on February 10 on tough new law-and-order measures designed to discourage further demonstrations.

These moves probably have pleased politically conservative Egyptians and those in the middle class who fear further domestic upheavals. The harsh security measures, however, are not likely to be well received by Egyptian students and other politically sophisticated groups, which have enjoyed greater freedom under Sadat's recent political liberalization program. The President's get-tough policy will receive its first major test with the reopening of Egypt's universities, now scheduled for February 12.

Sadat's activities indicate that the unrest has refocused his attention on the country's domestic troubles and the needs of its people. This could be an important positive side effect of the riots. In recent months the President has appeared to be

out of touch with the great majority of Egyptians and the magnitude of the problems facing them daily.

Sadat himself realizes there is little he can do to alleviate the immediate economic hardships that are the primary cause of the Egyptian public's unhappiness. He has appealed for patience during the "four lean years" he says the country is facing.

For now, Sadat is hoping for new cash aid from wealthy conservative Arab states to shore up his position. Even that would provide little short-term relief, however, and long range solutions will be difficult and not easily accepted by the hard-pressed Egyptian people.

Relations with the USSR 3235

Recent new anti-Soviet actions by the Egyptians and another postponement by the USSR of negotiations on a bilateral trade protocol for 1977 have aggravated long-standing strains in Egyptian-Soviet relations.

The Soviet move in late January was especially irritating to the Egyptians as it was the third time Moscow had deferred the talks in less than two months. The Soviets were apparently reacting in part to charges in the Egyptian media that the USSR had helped fuel the antigovernment food riots; Egypt had also moved to obstruct several Soviet cultural delegations in Cairo. The introduction of a bill in the Egyptian parliament on January 26 calling for severing diplomatic relations with the USSR may have been an additional spur to the Soviet decision.

In any event, the postponement was followed by new and harsher public criticism of the USSR by Sadat, who was doubtless already irked by the extensive and prolonged Soviet media coverage of the rioting episode. This time, the Egyptian President flatly accused the Soviets of responsibility for the riots.

Trade relations between the two countries will continue even if the two sides never get around to initialing the 1977 protocol. Soviet-Egyptian trade reached a high level in 1974, for example, without a formal trade protocol.

Apart from the new irritants in

Soviet-Egyptian relations, Moscow remains determined to keep pressure on Sadat and to refrain from any significant inducements to the Egyptians as long as Cairo gives priority to its ties with the US and ignores Soviet complaints. Moscow has been particularly incensed at Sadat's domestic policies, which continue to de-emphasize socialist institutions in favor of the entry of Arab and Western capital.

At the same time, the Soviets do not want to make bilateral relations still worse and have therefore been reticent in their response to Sadat's charges. Some effort to smooth over the latest quarrel may be attempted by a Soviet Foreign Ministry official who arrived in Cairo for talks on February 8.

The official's primary focus, however, will almost certainly not be bilateral relations, but rather the question of Middle East peace negotiations. His main mission probably is to convey to the Egyptians, in advance of Secretary Vance's arrival in Cairo next week, the importance attached by Soviet leaders to a return to the Geneva negotiating forum.

The Soviets remain highly concerned that a new power balance may be emerging in the Middle East that will diminish their influence further and cut them out of the peacemaking process.

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TURKEY 37.41

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Turkey's coalition government is under increasing pressure because of continuing violence between militant young rightists and left-wingers, which resulted in 21 deaths last month. The disorders have also added to strains among the four disparate parties that make up the coalition.

Civil disorder has become an important issue for the election scheduled for this fall, with opposition leader Ecevit charging that the government is unable to ensure internal security.

The government is especially vulnerable on the issue because one coalition party—the extreme-right Nationalist Action

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